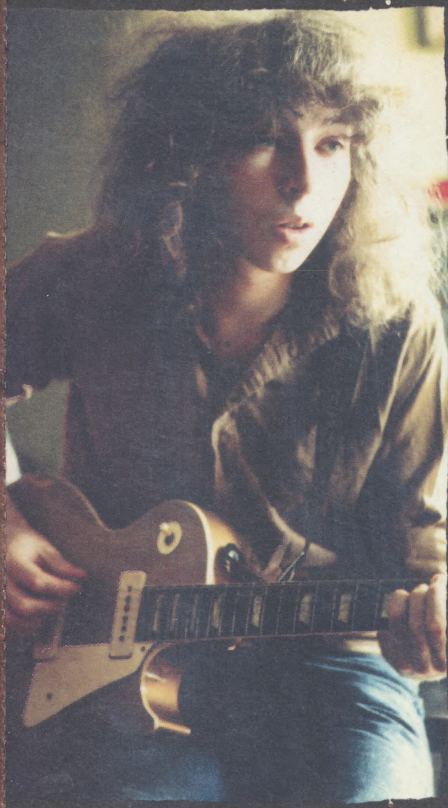


THE BEST OF  
**Richard & Linda  
Thompson**

THE island records YEARS





1. ROLL OVER VAUGHN WILLIAMS
2. THE POOR DITCHING BOY
3. WHEN I GET TO THE BORDER
4. WITHERED AND DIED
5. I WANT TO SEE THE BRIGHT LIGHTS TONIGHT
6. DOWN WHERE THE DRUNKARDS ROLL
7. THE END OF THE RAINBOW
8. THE GREAT VALERIO
9. HOKEY POKEY
10. NEVER AGAIN
11. A HEART NEEDS A HOME
12. FOR SHAME OF DOING WRONG
13. NIGHT COMES IN
14. BEAT THE RETREAT
15. DIMMING OF THE DAY
16. CALVARY CROSS *live*



ISLAND

A UNIVERSAL MUSIC COMPANY

©© 2000 The Island Def Jam Music Group, a Division of UMG Recordings, Inc.,  
 825 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10019 — U.S.A. Distributed by  
 Universal Music & Video Distribution, Inc. Warning: All rights reserved.  
 Unauthorized duplication is a violation of applicable laws. 314 542 456-2



# THE BEST OF Richard & Linda Thompson

In May 1982, at the end of his association with his then-wife and singing partner, Linda Thompson, Richard Thompson found himself on a twenty-date U.S. tour being pushed through a series of nightly exorcisms for two troubled souls whose red-raw emotions stood revealed in song. It had been twelve years since he had last toured Stateside, with the fifth-album fourth line-up Fairport Convention. In that time he had made six albums with Linda Thompson and two albums, one entirely instrumental (*Strict Tempo*), in his own name - despite a sabbatical between autumn 1975 and spring 1978 to join a Sufi commune and explore their new-found Islamic beliefs.

Richard & Linda Thompson's 'conversion' to Sufiism signaled the end of what might be termed their 'English' period (as well as their association with Island Records). Though the duo returned to the boards in 1978, Richard proved mighty reluctant to per-



form songs from that English period until, back in the States, he found he had a dozen productive years to revisit. Thus it was that he rediscovered the likes of 'Withered And Died', 'For Shame Of Doing Wrong', 'Down Where The Drunkards Roll', 'Dimming Of The Day', 'Hard Luck Stories', 'A Heart Needs A Home', 'I Want To See The Bright Lights



Tonight' and 'Night Comes In', the core songs from his most focused era. Having to relive these in performances from the river's edge, Richard at last came to terms with an honorable past, even as he was burning all his bridges.

Richard & Linda Thompson had only recently made a triumphant return to critical favour with 1982's *Shoot Out The Lights*, and Richard would go on to forge a successful solo career, but it would be the albums he made with Fairport between 1968 and 1970 and the four albums he made in the first half of the seventies - *Henry The Human Fly* (1972), *I Want To See The Bright Lights Tonight* (1974), *Hokey Pokey* (1975) and *Pour Down Like Silver* (1975) (plus the double-album anthology *Guitar, Vocal* (1976)) - to which critics would return with increasing regularity when they sought to define an entire strain of English folk-rock, and/or wished to

highlight Thompson's instrumental versatility, brooding lyricism or Linda's seemingly-effortless flights of sonority.

The circumstances surrounding the Thompsons' remarkable quartet, released by Island between 1972 and 1975, were quite unique - nor are they ones likely to be repeated. Unlike the other astral bursts of creativity that album-a-year singer-songwriters managed in the era in which productivity was a given, none of these albums even dented the

charts either side of the pond. If the likes of Dylan's three albums in 1965-66, Bowie's early seventies triple whammy, or Costello's early eighties trio were set against some kind of commercial profile, Richard & Linda Thompson existed in a netherworld where commercial pressures hardly ever impinged, where record company reservations, such as they were, didn't stop them from putting the records out. As Linda likes to observe, "In those days we took it for granted there was unlimited studio time. We'd be in the canteen, sitting chatting to Bob Marley, and then he'd go into one studio and we'd go into another. He'd sell eighty million records, and we'd sell eight!"

Island was a unique record company. Founded by Chris Blackwell, it was built on solid musical foundations. When Island inherited the Witchseason roster from Joe Boyd, at the end of 1970, they seemed willing to distribute whatever the Fairport family brought to the table - treating its survivors with kid gloves, and giving them a great deal of artistic freedom, albeit bound by the promotional constraints of a genuinely independent record label. As the head of Island's PR side at the time, David Sandison, recalls, "In A&R terms it was always down to Chris [Blackwell] ... I was talking with Chris one time [about a new signing] and he said, 'They've got four albums to make it' - which is a hell of a luxury."



When Richard Thompson elected to leave Fairport Convention at the end of 1970, frustrated by the band's direction and tired of the endless gigging, he too was given the opportunity to find his voice over a series of albums. Only when sessions for a fourth Richard & Linda album, in the spring of 1977, grew chaotic, did Island and the Thompsons part

company. Even then, Linda recalls, "when Chris Blackwell threw us off the label, he came to us at a party and said, I love you guys but I'm gonna have to let you go."

The four albums the pair made for Island Records have grown in stature over the years. *I Want To See The Bright Lights Tonight* and *Pour Down Like Silver*, in particular, have become critics' choices in those ubiquitous Top Hundred polls. The four albums remain a totality, a distillation of all that remains best about the peculiarly Fairport Convention-driven form of English folk-rock.

Though Linda would only assume partnership status with the second album in that quartet of releases, it is with their first recording as a couple that the story of their English Years begins. Linda Peters was an old, old friend of Sandy Denny, Fairport's erstwhile singer, with whom Richard had resumed his association after also leaving Fairport Convention. Though Linda's recording career to date had comprised just two sixties singles with fellow folkie Paul McNeill and a session recording Nick Drake and John Martyn songs with Elton John for Joe Boyd, her long-standing association with Sandy Denny led to an invite to The Manor in Oxford in December 1971 to help Sandy, Richard and assorted refugees from Fairport Convention, Fotheringay, et al, record an album of rock & roll covers under the moniker, The Bunch. The resultant album gave Linda her first memorable official cut (her duet with Sandy on The Everly Brothers' 'When Will I Be Loved') and 24-hour a day proximity to Mr. Thompson for the first time. The final sessions for The Bunch album, in January 1972, also coincided with the three days of sessions it took Thompson to record half of his first solo album and, not surprisingly, when backing vocals were required it was to Linda and Sandy that he turned to.

The resultant album, *Henry The Human Fly*, was beyond quirky. Densely layered with incongruous instruments, and without any of the guitar extemporisations for which Thompson had become justly renowned from his time with Fairport, the album was dismissed by some as idiosyncratic. Talking about the album in 1975, Richard insisted, "I think the style ... was very clear in my mind ... what actually came out was a bit different from what I thought, but it was still very English. I don't think it was a very successful

record, in terms of the finished result. I'd like to do it again." This would become a familiar mantra in the ensuing years, but at the time he "really just wanted to make a record of songs. And I wanted to see what they sounded like all together on a record ... it shows what I think English music should sound like ... I believe in preserving the tradition as a very pure thing. But I also believe in a parallel development. Because if you don't develop it, there ain't gonna be any British music."

That parallel development is shown at its very best on the album's opening track, 'Roll Over Vaughn Williams', which fires off a couple of guitar salvos that suggest a restrained but cohesive style, tersely economical and doubly effective for that. The lyrics are also biting bitter, carrying their own words of warning in verse one: "don't expect the words to ring/ too sweetly on the ear." Truly, the man who first announced his lyrical skills back in 1968 with "Take the sun from my eyes/ Let me learn to despise..." ('Tale In Hard Time'), was back with a vengeance. The album wrapped itself up, thirty-seven minutes later, with 'Twisted's' memorable refrain - "Something tells me I'm twisted," the first of a number of drinking songs in the canon from a former hardhitter, viewed from the wagon. Thompson later revealed the appeal of these characters, "I find the people in the bars are the most interesting people in society. They're the ones who can't stand it. They're the ones who see something terrible about what goes on, and they want to kill the pain of it."

Despite an incisive review by Bud Scoppa in *Rolling Stone* that recognised, "Every individual element, from the electric guitars to the accordion to Richard's vocals, conspir[ing] to form a dense drone that resonates from one end of the album to the other without pause," *Henry The Human Fly* sold poorly. Thompson would continue to assign an undue portion of blame to his vocals, insisting that "if Wordsworth could go back and cross out the exclamation points, surely I can go back and redo the vocals," though no such criticism could be leveled at his next excursion.

*I Want To See The Bright Lights Tonight* is viewed by many as the Thompsons' finest forty minutes - appearing in both *Mojo's* Greatest Hundred Albums Ever Made and *Rolling*

Stone's Top Hundred Albums (1967-87). At the time, though, it took a great deal of effort to even get the album out. Recorded in the early months of 1973, after Richard and Linda tied the knot, legally and musically, with a registry wedding and an autumn tour as a duo (still billed as Richard Thompson & Linda Peters), it was an alliance that finally enabled Richard to write songs for every occasion, even if the quota of die-cut doom & gloom still comfortably exceeds jaunty ditties. Talking at the time of the album's release, in the spring of 1974, after the vinyl shortage finally began to abate, Richard stated that, "we should have taken out a slow track and put in a fast one, but we didn't really have one at that time. I mean, if we were concentrating on making a balanced record," which self-evidently they were not.

In truth, no amount of levity was going to make an album that contained the impossibly bleak 'End Of The Rainbow' (there's nothing at the end of the rainbow/ there's nothing to grow up for anymore"), the disturbingly driven 'Calvary Cross' or the wistfully fatalistic 'Withered And Died' rise up like the sun. And yet, it remains an uplifting listening experience, right from the kick-off-your-shoes shuffle of 'When I Get To The Border' which again opens the album in grand style, a declaration of intent that even Richard has found hard to deny in later times, after understatingly describing *Bright Lights* as "probably what *Henry* ... should have been ... the arrangements are a bit more coherent."

Despite Island adopting as its pre-release single the afternoon-before-the-evening-out optimism of the title-track, and providing the funds for Richard & Linda to tour for the first time with a band, Sour Grapes (supporting Traffic on a UK Tour), the duo found themselves no nearer mass recognition. Nevertheless, Island continued to open up the studio doors and to release the results.

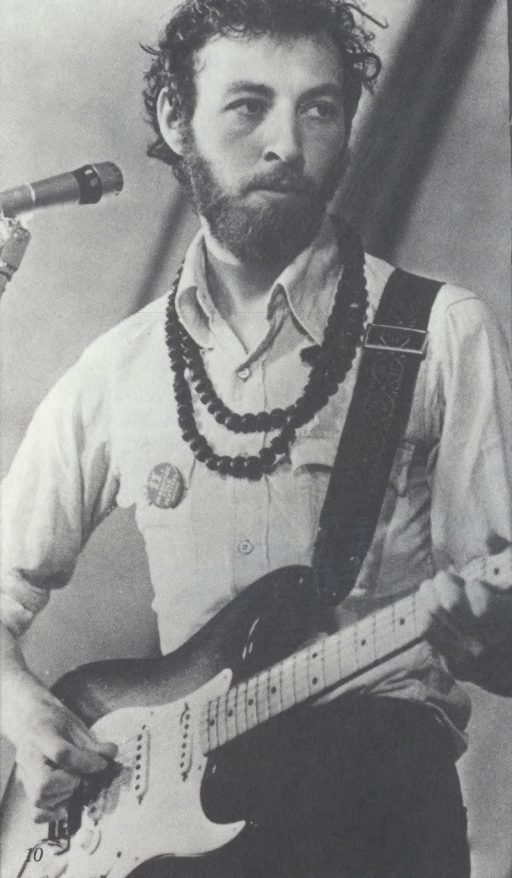
Ironically, *Hokey Pokey*, on which Richard set out to achieve a "balanced record," is considered by many the least successful of the Island albums. Even Thompson himself, talking at the time, viewed the experience as slightly schizophrenic, "We had three months off because of purely physical things. It was Linda's voice. It was a bit awkward really when we came back. There was a whole new perspective on it simply because to us it wasn't a

new record by then. If I listen to it now I can hear the split down the middle."

If the dysphonia that would sporadically threaten Linda's singing career had stuck its finger in her ear for the first time, it is hard to hear where. Her singing on the outtake version of 'A Heart Needs A Home' (first issued on *Guitar, Vocal*) and 'Never Again' may well be her two clearest moments. 'Never Again', in particular, has a real bravura to the performance, one dripping with remorse and blighted by grief. It was a song originally penned back in 1969, after the death of Richard's then-girlfriend Jeannie Franklyn in the Fairport motorway crash, the youngest of three sisters. When Thompson returned to it in 1973, seeking to write a third verse that completed the circle, he found the whole experience unreal, "it's strange, I don't really think I wrote it. It just came from somewhere." As did Linda's vocal.

The bleakness of some of the material on *Hokey Pokey* - notably 'I'll Regret It All In The Morning' ("if I beat you nearly dead/ I'll regret it all in the morning") and 'The Sun Never Shines On The Poor' - suggested someone who continued to empathise with those carrying "this monstrous chip on the shoulder which stops them from enjoying themselves a lot of the time." By the time Richard and Linda released the last installment in their Island odyssey, they had replaced the false evangelism of 'Mole In A Hole' with an unconventional Sufi brand of Islam, and Richard had added some real bile to his caustic wit. *Pour Down Like Silver* pulls no punches. From second one "the tears fall down like whisky/ the tears fall down like wine/ on an island made of cocaine/ in a sea of turpentine."

This time the jauntiness of each side-opener, 'Streets Of Paradise' and 'Jet Plane In A Rocking Chair', reveals layer upon layer of secrets and lies, dissembling them in unravelled codes, a language for the foolish and the wise: "Sea cruise in a diving bell/ Run a mile in a wishing well/ Soft soap and nothing to sell." Thompson himself phrased it in terms of his new-found faith, "There's less of us in the record, less self, less ego, because those other albums were made before we became Moslems ... and there's alot of ego-tripping and stuff on them ... the kind of self-expression that most people use music



for. In the new one there's ... more of an allegory that means something less about oneself and more about the world."

*Pour Down Like Silver* also finally allowed Thompson the guitarist to cut loose the writer's strings, tuning his guitar to plum the depths no voice can hope to hum when 'Night Comes In'. On April 25, 1975, Richard and Linda also returned to the London stage, with an Island mobile truck out back, and the Fairport Full House rhythm-section, appended by multi-instrumentalist John Kirkpatrick, out front, lending a little musical weight to the mix. Roadie Bernard Doherty remembered the occasion to biographer Patrick Humphries, "The crunch date was the Queen Elizabeth Hall when suddenly Richard said he would play electric ... There was all this mystique about whether he would play 'Calvary Cross', because it had all these religious overtones ... And he did, it was so great ... All the band had enormous grins after the Q.E.H. show."

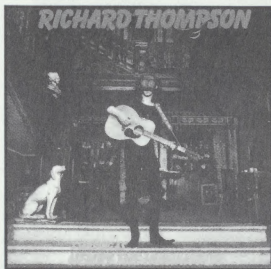
For the next six months, inbetween sessions for *Pour Down Like Silver*, the five-piece would play the occasional event until, come November, they took to the road for a fully-fledged UK Tour. Again the Island mobile truck tagged along, capturing shows in Swindon and Oxford, the penultimate show of the tour, and the night where Richard Thompson unleashed definitive renderings of three of his finest solo offerings. 'For Shame Of Doing Wrong', 'Night Comes In' and 'Calvary Cross' all broke more than the ten-minute barrier that night, they rattled a number of musical ghosts. 'Calvary Cross', in particular, broke through a number of hidden worlds, searching for the key.

Only once has Thompson really talked about this song at any length, to a befuddled NME journalist at the height of his Islamic isolation, but when he did he opened up, "The woman in 'Calvary Cross' was music; a view of music as something that can possess you - in that you're looking for it, rather than the other way around ... I used to feel very enslaved by music." If so, the live 'Calvary Cross' that night in Oxford was an extraordinary way to cut himself free - at least temporarily - from music's thrall. By the time that 'Calvary Cross' had been collected onto the richly diverse *Guitar, Vocal* anthology, at the tail-end of 1976, the man himself was looking to trammel down his past songs, denying the darkling self that inspired them and refusing to recognise that it all comes round again:

Richard Thompson: I'm not into the sentiments of them anymore ... they don't interest me. They're sentiments that I might feel, but I don't confirm ... There's so much in the old songs that I don't want to express. If you a sing a song night after night it has an effect ... you start living the song, and there are a lot of my songs that I wouldn't want to live in.

— Clinton Heylin,  
author of 'No More Sad Refrains:  
*The Story of Sandy Denny*'.





- 1 **ROLL OVER VAUGHN WILLIAMS** 4.11
- 2 **THE POOR DITCHING BOY** 3.02

Richard Thompson - guitar, accordion, vocals  
 Pat Donaldson - bass  
 Timi Donald - drums  
 Sue Draheim - fiddle  
 Andy Roberts - dulcimer

Produced by Richard Thompson and John Wood for Witchseason Productions  
 Engineered by John Wood at Sound Techniques, Ltd., London

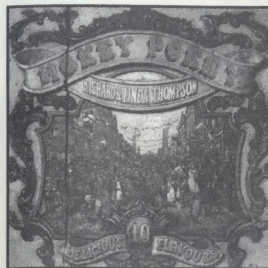
Taken from HENRY THE HUMAN FLY! (Island ILPS 9197), released June 1972.

- 3 **WHEN I GET TO THE BORDER** 3.24
- 4 **WITHERED AND DIED** 3.24
- 5 **I WANT TO SEE THE BRIGHT LIGHTS TONIGHT** 3.07
- 6 **DOWN WHERE THE DRUNKARDS ROLL** 4.05
- 7 **THE END OF THE RAINBOW** 3.55
- 8 **THE GREAT VALERIO** 5.22

Richard Thompson - guitar, hammered dulcimer, keyboards, vocals  
 Linda Thompson - vocals  
 Simon Nicol - dulcimer  
 Pat Donaldson - bass  
 Timi Donald - drums  
 John Kirkpatrick - Anglo concertina and accordion  
 Brian Gulland, Richard Harvey - Krummhorn  
 Royston Wood, Trevor Lucas - backing vocal  
 CWS (Manchester) Silver Band

Produced by Richard Thompson and John Wood  
 Engineered by John Wood at Sound Techniques, Ltd., London

Taken from I WANT TO SEE THE BRIGHT LIGHTS TONIGHT (Island ILPS 9266), released April 1974.

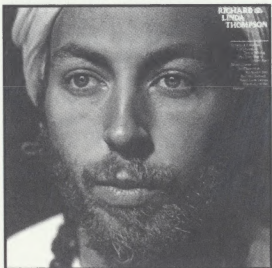


- 9 **HOKEY POKEY** 3.20
- 10 **NEVER AGAIN** 3.07
- 11 **A HEART NEEDS A HOME** *alternate version* \* 4.05

Richard Thompson - guitar, electric dulcimer, vocals  
 Linda Thompson - vocals  
 Simon Nicol - guitar, piano, organ, electric 12 string guitar, autoharp, vocals  
 Timi Donald - drums, percussion  
 Pat Donaldson - bass  
 John Kirkpatrick - accordion  
 Ian Whiteman - piano, flute organ  
 Aly Bain - fiddle

Produced by John Wood and Simon Nicol  
 \* Produced by Richard Thompson and John Wood  
 Engineered by John Wood at Sound Techniques, Ltd., London

Taken from HOKEY POKEY (Island ILPS 9305), released February 1975.  
 \*Taken from (GUITAR, VOCAL) (Island ICD 8), released May 1976.



12 **FOR SHAME OF DOING WRONG** 4.42

13 **NIGHT COMES IN** 8.06

14 **BEAT THE RETREAT** 5.47

15 **DIMMING OF THE DAY** 3.48

Richard Thompson - guitar, oud, dulcimer, banjo,  
Fender Rhodes, harmonium, vocals

Linda Thompson - vocals

Pat Donaldson - bass

Dave Pegg - bass on FOR SHAME OF DOING WRONG

Timi Donald - drums

Dave Mattacks - drums on FOR SHAME OF DOING WRONG

John Kirkpatrick - button accordion and Anglo concertina

Nic Jones and Aly Bain - fiddles

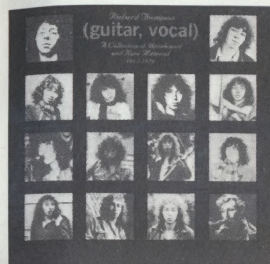
Jack Brymer - clarinet

Ian Whiteman - concert flute and Shakuhachi

Produced by John Wood and Richard Thompson

Engineered by John Wood at Sound Techniques, Ltd., London

Taken from POUR DOWN LIKE SILVER (Island ILPS 9348), released October 1975.



16 **CALVARY CROSS** *live* 13.27

Richard Thompson - Fender Stratocaster guitar, vocal

Linda Thompson - backing vocal

John Kirkpatrick - button accordion

Dave Pegg - bass

Dave Mattacks - drums

Recorded live at Oxford Polytechnic on November 27, 1975  
with the Island Mobile recording unit.

Remixed at Sound Techniques, London, February 1976.

Recording and remix engineer: John Wood

Taken from (GUITAR, VOCAL) (Island ICD 8), released May 1976.

All songs written by Richard Thompson

Compilation produced by Bill Levenson

Essay and additional research by Clinton Heylin

Mastered by Suha Gur at Universal Music Studios, Edison, New Jersey.

Analog to digital transfers by Gary Moore, Alan Leeming and Keiron McGarry  
at Universal Digital Mastering Studios, London.

Tape research by Jane Hitchin, David Lascelles and Zoe Roberts at Universal Tape Library, London;  
Chris Ramos at Universal Tape Library, Edison, New Jersey.

Art Direction: Vartan

Design: SMAY VISION

Photos courtesy of Ed Haber Collection, Island Records Archives

Project coordination: Margaret Goldfarb

Special thanks to: Claire Sugrue, Helen Ainsley, Steve Matthews and Iain Snodgrass at Island Records UK;  
Joe Boyd and Ed Haber.





THE BEST OF  
**Richard & Linda  
Thompson**

THE island records YEARS

© 2000 The Island Def Jam Music Group,  
a Division of UMG Recordings, Inc.  
314 542 456-2

